THE WITNESS OF THE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, CONSIDER'D;

In Answer to the principal Objections against them.

By WILLIAM WEBSTER, M. A.

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TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND

THE

Lord BISHOP of *OXFORD*,

As a publick Teſtimony of the Author's Veneration for his Lordſhip's

Great Learning, Piety, Meekneſs, and Affability;

His Remarkable and Conſtant Zeal for Chriſtianity;

His ſteady Adherence to the Eſtabliſh'd Church;

His Paternal and Diſintereſted Affection for its Clergy;

For theſe truly Epiſcopal, and univerſally acknowledged Virtues,

This DISCOURSE is humbly inſcrib'd,

By his LORDSHIP's

Moſt obedient humble Servant,

William Webſter.

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THE PREFACE.

WHAT I here offer to the Reader, is only part, *of a diſcourſe which I intended to publiſh, 'till I had read the* Trial of the Witneſſes of the Reſurrection of Chriſt. *Tho' other pamphlets appear'd at that time wherein the objections of the adverſaries were very well anſwer'd, yet I thought that* ſome *parts of the ſubject were ſtill capable of improvement; at leaſt, that the ſame arguments might be placed in a new light according to the particular apprehenſion, or ability, of the Writer, by which means different readers might be convinced, or affected. But the abovemention'd Author writes with ſuch a ſuperiority of genius, that he has left no room for any* new matter, *and with ſuch a peculiar felicity as to* method *and* manner, *that it ſeem'd as impoſſible to ſay the ſame things after him without injuring the argument, as to find out any thing which did not occur to his uncommon ſagacity. But I ſhall ſay no more of this excellent performance, ſince I might as well attempt to* imitate *it, as to do juſtice to its character.*

What

What then could induce me to trouble the publick with any thing upon a ſubject ſo well handled, and only upon a particular part of it?

The ſeaſon of the year obliging me to reviſe my papers upon the Reſurrection *of* Chriſt, *I found I had conſider'd ſome of the objections againſt it with a* different view *from other writers, which gave me occaſion to make ſome ſeaſonable remarks, and to obviate ſome fundamental errors that run thro'* all *the modern writers on the* infidel *ſide. I can't tell whether this apology will be admitted as a reaſonable one, neither am I much concern'd about it. I have very little regard to my reputation as a* writer, *if I can but ſhew the ſincerity of my intentions as a* Chriſtian. *I had much rather be accuſed of* impertinence, *than be ſuſpected to want a becoming zeal for* Religion. *I have one thing farther to add, that if the reader ſhould think his* time loſt *in peruſing this diſcourſe, I have taken care, by making it very ſhort, that he ſhall loſe* but little.

May 1. 1731.
Temple-Bar.

The

The Fitneſs of the

WITNESSES

OF

Chriſt's Reſurrection.

THE reſurrection of Chriſt being a matter of fact ſo eſſential to the truth of *his* religion, and the foundation of *our* faith and hope, unbelievers have been particularly induſtrious to raiſe objections againſt it. Among other difficulties that have been ſtarted upon this important ſubject, it has been urged, that his appearance after his reſurrection was not *publick* enough; and the witneſſes, both for *number* and *quality*, not anſwerable to the weight which was to be laid upon their teſtimony. The hiſtory of Chriſt's reſurrection informs us that, tho' he appear'd *openly*, yet he did not appear to *all the people*, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, but only to a *ſelect* number of perſons appointed to be witneſſes of it to the reſt of the world. Theſe *choſen* witneſſes were the *twelve Apo-*

ſtles only ; for, though Chriſt appeared to others, as well as unto them, even to five hundred of his Diſciples at one time, yet only the Apoſtles were appointed to bear *publick* teſtimony to the truth of his reſurrection. It is farther urged, with regard to the *manner* of his appearance, that the witneſſes were improperly choſen, in reſpect to their *ſtation* and *circumſtances*. The ſeveral exceptions againſt them may all be reduced under the three following heads, which ſhall be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe.

The *firſt* objection is, That Chriſt did not appear in a more *publick* manner to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of ſuch *publick* and *univerſal* concern to them.

2dly. Becauſe he did not appear to the *Prieſts* and *Rulers*, who, it is pretended, were the perſons more immediately concern'd in matters relating to their *religion*, and *government*.

3dly. That he appeared only to his particular *friends* and *followers*, whoſe teſtimony cannot be ſo ſatisfactory to us as that of his *enemies* would have been.

I am not forward to dive into the ſecret counſels of the all-wiſe God, thinking it more

more becoming our limited capacities to reſt ſatisfied with the methods of providence, than to undertake the ſolution of them upon precarious conjectures; but, as far as we are concerned in theſe queſtions, we are able, upon *rational* grounds, to vindicate the *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs* of God; which, by his aſſiſtance, I ſhall now endeavour to do.

Firſt it is objected, that Chriſt did not appear, after his reſurrection, in a more *publick* manner, to the *multitude* of the unbelieving *Jews*, when his appearance was of ſuch *publick* and *univerſal* concern to them.

This objection muſt be conſider'd under two different reſpects.

I. As it concerns the conviction of *mankind* in *general.*
II. As it relates to the *Jews* in particular.

1ſt. Then I am to conſider this objection in reſpect to the conviction of *mankind* in *general.* The objection above mentioned is founded upon this ſuppoſition, that a more *publick* appearance, to the *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have given a more convincing

evidence of the truth of his reſurrection, than the teſtimony of a *ſelect* number of perſons, however qualified, is able to give us. But I cannot help thinking it *morally impoſſible* that the world in general could have had ſo good evidence, if Chriſt *had* appeared in ſo *publick* a manner, as we have now upon the teſtimony of the twelve Apoſtles only; unleſs we ſuppoſe, what *cannot* be ſuppoſed, that *all* the people would have been converted by his appearance, and have continued ſtedfaſt in the faith. For, beſides that *all* the people were not *qualified* to be witneſſes of his Reſurrection, *all* of them not being ſufficiently acquainted with his perſon, which muſt have occaſioned variety of opinions concerning the reality of it; beſides this, I ſay, the *Jews*, (eſpecially the *prieſts* and *rulers*, who had a mighty influence upon the people) had obſtinately reſiſted the evidence of many and extraordinary miracles, and conſpired to put Chriſt to death only for raiſing *Lazarus* to life; ſo that they were not likely to be converted by the Reſurrection of *Chriſt himſelf*. They who had aſcribed one of the greateſt of his miraculous works to the operation of the *Devil*, might with equal reaſon have reſolved

this appearance of Chriſt into a deluſion and impoſition upon their ſenſes, by the operation of a diabolical power: At leaſt, they had impudence enough to have denied the fact, and to have uſed all poſſible means, as well to prevent the belief of it in others, as to force them to a denial of it. Their ſuborning the ſoldiers to ſwear that the Diſciples of Chriſt came *by night and ſtole his body out of the ſepulchre while they were aſleep*, ſhews, beyond contradiction, that they would have left no methods of corruption unattempted, and that the *people*, either for the lucre of a little money, or from the dread of perſecution, would have aſſerted, or deny'd any thing. This then being the caſe, (and I think it a very clear and obvious one) what would have been the conſequence? Why, that there would have been *contradictory* evidence upon record, ſome *affirming*, others *denying* the truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection; nay, the very ſame witneſſes, at different times, both *affirming* and *denying* it. Now, if Chriſt had appeared to ſuch a large and mixed multitude of people, ſome of whom would have contradicted, not only *one another*, but *themſelves*, how could we, at this diſtance of time, come at the true knowledge

knowledge of ſuch a variety of characters, and other intricate circumſtances, in order to judge whoſe teſtimony is the moſt credible, or whether the fact be, upon the whole, worthy of our belief, or not. Much leſs could ſuch a contradictory teſtimony be equally ſatisfactory to us with that of a ſelect number of witneſſes, all of them competent judges of the fact, all of them agreeing in their report, all of them confirming their teſtimony by miracles, and at laſt ſealing it with their blood.

But, if the teſtimony of others may be to us the ground of a reaſonable aſſent to the truth of any fact (which, I preſume, will not be diſputed) the queſtion will be, not whether a more *publick* manifeſtation of Chriſt to *all* the people, to the whole *multitude* of the *Jews*, would have been more ſatisfactory to *them*; or whether their teſtimony would not have been to *us* a ſtronger evidence of his reſurrection, than the teſtimony of the Apoſtles; I ſay, this will *not* be the queſtion; but whether the teſtimony of the Apoſtles, who were choſen by God to be witneſſes of it to the world, be not a *ſufficient* evidence of it. For, whenever God is pleaſed to require our aſſent

aſſent to any matter of fact, he is not obliged to give us *all* the evidence, whereof the fact is capable, but only ſuch a degree of evidence upon which we may build a *rational* conviction. Suppoſe, for inſtance, that any matter of fact done at any diſtant part of this kingdom were atteſted by a certain number of credible perſons, would any of us think it a reaſonable objection againſt the truth of it, that it might have been atteſted by a greater number, if it be already ſufficiently atteſted? We are very ready to allow, that, in proportion to the weight and conſequence of any doctrine, or fact, it ſeems reaſonable that we ſhould have clearer and ſtronger proof. In ſome caſes, of leſſer moment, *human* laws are ſatisfied with *one* witneſs, in others of a more important nature, they proceed with more caution, and require the poſitive evidence of *two* perſons. So likewiſe in the buſineſs of religion, the making of a new revelation to mankind, upon which depend our *eternal life*, or *death*, we may *here* expect to meet with ſtronger evidence than any *temporal* concern requires. Yet this kind of reaſoning muſt be managed with a great deal of caution, or it will lead us into infidelity. As to the point now

under

under conſideration, the truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection, it being a matter of ſuch infinite moment, it ſeems reaſonable that the evidence ſhould bear *ſome degree* of *proportion* to the *importance* of the truth. But if we argue too cloſely from the *infinite* diſtance between the importance of things *temporal* and *eternal*, requiring a degree of evidence *proportionably* greater in one caſe, than in the other, we may require ſuch an *irreſiſtible* evidence as will leave no room for the exerciſe of humility, and a due regard to the wiſdom of God in his diſpenſations; or, indeed, for the exerciſe of our faith, conſidered under any proper notion of it. Wherefore in all our religious enquiries let us attend principally to *this* conſideration, whether the thing be highly credible *in itſelf*, and ſuch as would ſatisfy us in affairs relating to the *preſent* life, without attempting to determine *exactly* what *degree* of evidence any particular truth requires. If infinite Wiſdom had thought it fitting, the Reſurrection of Chriſt might have been manifeſted in a *more publick* manner, and atteſted by a *greater* number; but if it be already ſufficiently atteſted, it is highly unreaſonable to reject a credible teſtimony, only becauſe the

goodneſs

goodneſs of God might have granted us a teſtimony *ſtill more* convincing, tho' his *juſtice* did not *oblige* him to do it, and his *wiſdom* did not think it *expedient*. Thus far I have conſider'd the objection, as it affects the conviction of *mankind in general*; which is a conſideration more worthy the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, than the unreaſonable demands of *hardened infidels*.

2dly. As to the *Jews*, in particular, if a more extraordinary method of conviction ſeems requiſite for the converſion of ſuch inveterate enemies, than for others who were better diſpoſed to believe the truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection, This gave them no right at all to *demand* it; neither was it conſiſtent with the ſettled purpoſes of God that they ſhould have been convinced in ſuch an extraordinary manner. Their obdurate temper, which aroſe from their own luſts and paſſions, was in itſelf highly *criminal*, deſerving rather the *Divine vengeance*, than any particular marks of *favour* and *goodneſs*. Their ſlowneſs of heart to believe the miracles of our Saviour, and to embrace his doctrine, proceeded from their inveterate malice, and their malice was the effect only of their pride and ambition, which diſdain'd

a crucified Redeemer; and of their impure and carnal affections, which were impatient of the reſtraint of his holy precepts. But was God obliged to have any regard to their wicked indiſpoſition, ſo as to proportion the degree of evidence to the exigency of their wants, which they had *voluntarily* brought upon themſelves? Or how could he do it conſiſtently with his predictions concerning their deſtruction for not believing in him ſooner? God had afforded them ſufficient means of conviction by the many miracles which Chriſt had wrought among them in his life-time, for rejecting which they juſtly merited that judicial viſitation which God determined and denounced againſt them. If therefore, after this, God had uſed any extraordinary means for their conviction, he had not only done more for them than they had any reaſon to expect, but he muſt have deſtroy'd his own immutable purpoſes, and falſified his own unerring predictions.

But 2dly, it may be objected that, tho' God was not obliged to ſatisfy the unreaſonable demands of harden'd infidels by manifeſting the Reſurrection of Chriſt to *all* the people of the *Jews*, yet why did he not appear to the

the *prieſts* and *rulers*, who may be thought the moſt proper perſons to be concerned in a tranſaction that related to their *religion* and *government?*

But this objection has no foundation but in the impotent wiſhes of unbelievers, no force beſides what it may chance to acquire from the poſitive air with which they endeavour to hide its weakneſs. If there be any real ſtrength in the argument, it muſt ariſe either from the nature of the thing, that is, from the conſideration of their *publick ſtation* and *authority*, which gave them a right to demand ſuch a *perſonal* appearance to them; or from ſome expreſs *promiſe of God*, that Chriſt ſhould appear *perſonally*, after his Reſurrection, to the *prieſts* and *rulers.*

1. But there is no reaſon in the *nature of things* that obliged Providence to grant them that particular evidence; they could not claim it in right of their *publick ſtation* and *authority.* Even in a tranſaction between two *independent nations*, kings do not appear in *perſon*, but ſend others in their name, with proper credentials, to act for them. But this affair, of the Reſurrection of Chriſt, was a tranſaction between the *Sovereign* of

the world, and his *creatures*, who were all *equally* obliged to ſubmit to his will, and not entitled to make any demands for *ſingular* privileges. In this caſe, therefore, which was a tranſaction between *God* and them, and not between them and their *inferiors*, there was no diſtinction of *governors* and *people*; they were *all*, both *rulers* and *people*, as *creatures*, upon a *level*; and God was not obliged to afford them, as being *governors*, any other evidence than what he thought proper for the reſt of the nation, and of *mankind* in *general*. No body can pretend that the *prieſts* and *rulers* could not have ſufficient reaſon to believe the Reſurrection of Chriſt, without being *eye-witneſſes* of it, becauſe then there would be no rational ground for our aſſent to any fact unleſs we had ſeen it. This aſſertion, ſure, is too groſs to be offer'd, or admitted, by any one. But if *any* part of the *Jewiſh* nation, or *mankind* in *general*, might be required to believe the Reſurrection of Chriſt upon the teſtimony of thoſe who were *eye-witneſſes* of it, why not the *prieſts* and *rulers*, as well as *private* perſons, as well as *diſtant* ages and nations? They might have *ſufficient* evidence, without the evidence of *ſenſe*, and it is abſurd to

ſay,

ſay, that they might *rationally* demand *more* evidence than what was ſufficient for a *rational conviction.*

2. And as to any expreſs *promiſe of God*, that Chriſt ſhould appear *perſonally* to the *prieſts* and *rulers* after his Reſurrection, nothing of that kind is to be found in his *word.* God did, indeed, promiſe that the goſpel ſhould *firſt* be preached to the *Jews.* And in order to *fulfil* his promiſe, and predictions relating to the life and actions of Chriſt, *Chriſt* did appear *publickly* among them, in their *ſtreets* and *market-places*; in the *ſynagogues*, and in the *temple*; he converſed with them, and explained the ſcriptures to them; he wrought various and mighty works among them, the truth of which they acknowledged, tho' they denied the Divine power by which they were wrought; but where is there any promiſe that the *prieſts* and *rulers* ſhould be *eye-witneſſes* of this particular fact? Or how was providence obliged to grant them any ſuch favour? It has been very juſtly obſerved, by the author of the *Trial of the Witneſſes*, that *Chriſt*'s particular commiſſion to the *Jews* ceaſed at his death; that they having finally rejected *him*, he took his final leave of *them*, and

and declared that they ſhould ſee him no more, and conſequently that he could not appear to them without falſifying his own declarations. But *had* the claim of the *Jews* to *ſingular* advantages, as being the *peculiar people* of God, ſtill ſubſiſted in the ſtrongeſt manner, this *national* prerogative did not give the *rulers* in *particular* a right to be *eye-witneſſes* of any particular fact, or miracle, relating to their *religion* and *government:* Neither could any *general* promiſe made to the *Jewiſh nation* be the foundation of any ſuch claim, becauſe it might be fulfill'd, if the rulers, by any means whatſoever, had ſufficient evidence of the truth of ſuch facts, whether from the report of their *own ſenſes*, or the credible *teſtimony* of *private* perſons. Their *publick* capacity gave them no *diſtinction* in this caſe. Their *authority* over the *people* gave them no claim upon *God*, the abſolute Governor of the world. This is a fact that ſome people were to believe upon the teſtimony of others, and whether the *rulers* or *private* perſons were to be the *witneſſes*, was matter of favour, and God was the beſt judge upon whom to beſtow it. So that if we could *not* ſee any reaſons why the *rulers* were diſqualified to

be

be witneſſes, 'twould be a ſufficient anſwer to ſay, that they were *not choſen* by God, who is infinitely wiſe in the choice of his inſtruments. But we can ſee the plaineſt and the ſtrongeſt reaſon why they were utterly *unfit* to be witneſſes of *Chriſt*'s Reſurrection, becauſe they would not have believed the truth of it, if they *had* ſeen him after he was riſen, and then the reſt of the world would have wanted a proper evidence of this important truth. And we can add farther, that if they *had* been in a diſpoſition to receive conviction from his *perſonal* appearance to them, ſuch extraordinary means of conviction could not be granted them, becauſe by the determinate counſel, and declared purpoſe, of God, they were devoted to deſtruction for their former infidelity.

But ſee the unreaſonableneſs and perverſneſs of theſe gainſayers! They are continually calling out *prieſtcraft*, *prieſtcraft*, and yet are objecting againſt the methods of eſtabliſhing Chriſtianity, becauſe they were not enforced by the weight of *authority*, which would have given a much juſter occaſion for the ſuſpicion of *fraud*. The witneſſes were *private*, and *mean*, and *obſcure* perſons, too *inconſiderable* to be employ'd in an affair

of

of ſuch moment: Men of *education*, it ſeems, and *learning*, and *dignity*, and *power*, were much fitter for the purpoſe. But who ſees not that the Apoſtles were the leſs likely to *intend* a fraud, and the leſs able to *execute* it, by reaſon of the meanneſs of their education, and the obſcurity of their characters; their ignorance of the world, and the arts of addreſs; their poverty and want of power?

3. But 'tis farther objected againſt the witneſſes of *Chriſt*'s Reſurrection, that they were his particular *friends*, ſtrongly attached to his cauſe, and affectionate to his perſon, for which reaſon they ſhould have been excepted as *partial* and *prejudiced* perſons; but that if the witneſſes had been taken out of the number of his *enemies*, whoſe prejudices and paſſions ran ſtrong againſt him, *their* teſtimony would have had the more weight, becauſe *they* could not be ſuſpected to believe the truth of his Reſurrection but upon the cleareſt evidence, or to teſtify it but upon the ſtrongeſt conviction.

I have already obſerved, that the only proper queſtion in reſpect to *this* and *all other* religious truths, is, whether we have *ſufficient* evidence, and therefore in anſwer to

this objection we need not enquire whether *Chriſt's enemies*, or *friends*, were the fitteſt perſons to be witneſſes of his Reſurrection, or whoſe teſtimony would be *moſt ſatisfactory* to the reſt of mankind, but whether the teſtimony of the *choſen* witneſſes be *credible in itſelf*; yet it may not be improper to obſerve, that unleſs the perſons appointed to be witneſſes had frequently ſeen Chriſt, and intimately converſed with him in his *life-time*, as well as *after his Reſurrection*, they would have been, in *that reſpect*, leſs qualified than his *particular friends*, to teſtify the truth of the fact, becauſe they would have been leſs competent judges of the reality of it; and if we ſuppoſe Chriſt to have appear'd, after he was riſen, to ſuch of his *enemies* as had been thus converſant with him, they muſt have been witneſſes of his *other* miracles. Now, if they were proof againſt the force of ſo many, and ſuch great miracles, what reaſon is there (as I remark'd under a former head of this diſcourſe) to imagine that they would have been converted upon his appearance to them after his Reſurrection, without ſuch an *over-ruling* influence as would have deſtroy'd their *free will*: ſo that if theſe *objectors* had been in the direction of this important affair, they

in their *abundant* wiſdom, would have choſen ſuch witneſſes of the Reſurrection of Chriſt as were either incompetent judges of its reality, or not at all likely to believe it themſelves: Very fit perſons theſe to ſet in council with *Omniſcience*, and preſcribe to their *Maker* in the government of the world! The more we examine into the diſpenſations of God, the more reaſon we ſhall have, not only to acknowledge his *Juſtice*, but to adore his *Wiſdom*, and to be thankful for his *Goodneſs*. But to quarrel with the evidence for the truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection becauſe it is not exactly ſuch as we could wiſh it to be, or wantonly imagine that it ought to be: To object againſt the witneſſes becauſe there were not *more* of them, becauſe they were *private* perſons, not the *rulers*, becauſe they were choſen from among Chriſt's *followers* and *friends*, not ſuch as were before *unbelievers* and *enemies*; all this is not *argument*, but *preſumption*; not *reaſoning*, but *rebelling againſt God*. No matter what their *number* was, provided it was *ſufficient*; no matter *who*, or *what* they were, provided they were *competent judges* of the fact, and *faithful relators* of it. If we indulge our fancy in imagining what *ſort* of evidence we ſhould have liked beſt, and object againſt

it only becauſe we think it might have been ſtronger, and more ſatisfactory; this objection will hold equally *againſt any degree* of evidence that is not abſolutely *irreſiſtible*, and ſubverts *all* religion, *natural*, as well as *revealed*, becauſe it deſtroys the very notion of a ſtate of *trial* and *probation*, and takes away the foundation of *rewards* and *puniſhments*; becauſe, upon this principle, we never can be obliged to *believe* any religious truth 'till it is impoſſible for us to *disbelieve* it. This is the unavoidble conſequence of ſuch objections, and it is the avow'd opinion of ſome of our celebrated *modern reaſoners*. I ſhall inſtance in one who ſeems to be ſo much admired and extolled, that we may well ſuppoſe him to ſpeak their ſentiments. Mr. *Chub*, in his *previous queſtion*, ſpeaking about *ſpeculative doctrines*, ſays, " that God will either ſo " clearly deliver ſuch points, as that there " ſhall be no place for error, or elſe he will " excuſe all errors which may ariſe from " them, it being moſt abſurd to ſuppoſe, " that a wiſe and good Being ſhould give " a revelation in a way in which it is *liable* " *to be miſunderſtood*, and then be diſpleaſed " with his creatures if they *miſtake* his " meaning of it, ſeeing ſuch errors are not, " in the nature of the thing, a proper foun-

« dation for reſentment." This is a propoſition that could not drop *haſtily* from a writer, but muſt be the reſult of *cool* and *deliberate* thought; and he lays it down gravely as a fundamental point. Now if all errors in *ſpeculative doctrines* be innocent becauſe they are not ſo *clearly* revealed as to leave *no room* for miſtake, then all error in reſpect to the truth of *revelation in general* muſt be equally innocent, unleſs the evidence be *ſo clear* and *ſtrong* as to exclude all *poſſibility of being miſtaken*, which is the very principle into which all the abovementioned objections againſt the Reſurrection of Chriſt muſt finally be reſolved.

But if this argument be concluſive, it renders all errors in *Morality*, as well as in *ſpeculative* points, innocent, and ſubverts the foundation of *rewards* and *puniſhments*, becauſe it deſtroys the notion of a ſtate of *trial* and *probation*, which ſuppoſes *room* for *error* and *ſin*. See the parallel between the two propoſitions.

It is abſurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED *with us for* ERRING, *if he has made us* LIABLE *to error.*

It is abſurd and ridiculous in God to be DISPLEASED *with us for* SINNING, *if he has made us* LIABLE *to ſin.*

Of

Of the ſame kind, and equally deſtructive, is another popular maxim, which is this; that all *neceſſary* articles of faith ſhould be ſo *plain* and *obvious* that the moſt *illiterate* perſon without any pains and difficulty, without any inſtruction or aſſiſtance, may underſtand them. As nothing can be believed without ſuch a degree of evidence as *forces* the aſſent, ſo That evidence muſt appear without the trouble of any ſearch or enquiry; from whence it follows, that we cannot be obliged to give our aſſent to any truth but what is *ſelf-evident*, and offers itſelf *caſually* to the mind, without any *attention*. For, if we may be obliged to uſe *any* means of information and conviction, we may be obliged to uſe *all* the means within our power; and if we cannot be obliged to the uſe of *all poſſible* means, 'tis impoſſible that we can be obliged to the uſe of *any*. The reaſoning is concluſive both backward, and forward. What makes us *accountable* beings is, our *free Will*; if then we may be accountable at all, we may be accountable for *every* thing within our power; whatever we have a *capacity* of doing, God may *oblige* us to do, and *puniſh* us for the neglect of it. There is as much reaſon why we may be required to apply to *others* for their inſtruction in order

der to underſtand any religious doctrine, as to apply ourſelves to the knowledge of it at all; to enquire and ſearch into the evidence for the truth of any *particular* doctrine of revelation, as of *revelation in general*; of *revelation*, and its *particular* doctrines, as of the truths of *natural religion* and *moral* duties. There is no poſſibility of maintaining their poſition without deſtroying the very notion of *probation*, which implies a power of *doing*, or *neglecting* our duty. Therefore all theſe queſtions muſt at laſt reſolve into this *ſingle one*, *Is it conſiſtent with the known attributes of the Divine nature to put us into a ſtate of trial?* They muſt anſwer in the *negative*, or elſe give up their notions about *irreſiſtible evidence*, and the *plainneſs* of all *neceſſary points*. *Reaſonable* evidence, and *proper* means of knowledge, is all that can be demanded by accountable creatures. This is what the adverſaries know, and mean; as appears more plainly from their way of *proving* their poſitions. They argue from the *Goodneſs* of God. The *ſtronger*, ſay they, the evidence for truth, and the more eaſily we diſcover and apprehend That evidence, the greater is the *Goodneſs* of God in granting us ſuch evidence, and a *good Being* will ſhew *all poſſible* Goodneſs to his creatures. But this

way

way of arguing is inconſiſtent with a ſtate of *trial*; for would not any of us think it *better* with regard to our *own particular happineſs*, that God ſhould have put it *out of our power* to make ourſelves *miſerable?* And if it would have been an act of *greater Goodneſs*; according to them, a *good* Being muſt have done it. It will prove farther, that the attribute of Goodneſs obliged God to create us as *perfect*, and *happy*, as a creature can be; in ſhort, to communicate *all poſſible* perfection and happineſs to as *many* beings as *Omnipotence* could create, and to create them all *eternal*; ſo that there ought not to be any *difference* between them, either in point of *duration* or *perfection*, which is contrary to what every man knows to be fact. Wild and extravagant as theſe conſequences are, they muſt follow neceſſarily if we reaſon from the attribute of *Goodneſs*, ſeparately taken; we ſhall have but a *partial* and *imperfect* notion of it without *wiſdom* to *direct* and *regulate*. We cannot argue from what would be good to a *particular* being, Good conſider'd *abſtractly* and *independently* of *other* beings, to what is *abſolutely good upon the whole* of things; which nothing can judge of but *unlimited* knowledge and wiſdom, becauſe nothing but Omniſcience can ſee at one

one view *all poſſible relations* of things, and the *fitneſſes* ariſing from them. But this is fully explain'd and proved in a piece lately publiſh'd by Mr. *Law*, in anſwer to *Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation*.

The conſideration of theſe groundleſs objections againſt Chriſtianity naturally ſuggeſts to us the wiſdom of guarding againſt the *captious* temper, the prevailing inclination of the age to ſtart *difficulties* upon all queſtions. If we give way to this *itch* of *ſpeculating*, and *objecting*, like an humour of the body that infects the whole maſs of blood, 'twill gradually infect the mind with a *ſceptical* diſpoſition that never fails of leading men into infidelity. However well grounded the truths of religion are, we may, through pride and other evil diſpoſitions, find room to cavil and object. It is impoſſible in the nature of things but that there will be *difficulties*, unleſs our underſtandings were *infinite*; and while we are ſubject to *paſſions* and *prejudices*, men will *make* difficulties where there really are none. We are made liable to error, that there may be room for *virtue*, and the *reward* of it; *finite* and *imperfect*, that we may be *humble* and *modeſt*. An honeſt heart and a teachable diſpoſition are the beſt preſervatives againſt error, not only as they

have the aſſurance of God's Grace to direct us, but as they put us into the fitteſt diſpoſition for the reception of truth. A ſtrong underſtanding, if it relies too much on its own ſtrength, ſoon begets a *ſelf-ſufficiency* that is the moſt fruitful ſource of error, the common parent of *infidelity*. *Self-love* betrays men into this *pride* of the underſtanding. From an inclination to make themſelves as *conſiderable* as they can, they flatter themſelves into a perſuaſion that their *natural faculties* are a *ſufficient guide*, without any *farther* help from their Maker. *Revelation* conſequently is *falſe*, becauſe it is *needleſs*. From *Deiſm* to *Atheiſm* the progreſs is natural, and the way ſhort. And if we obſerve the *manner* and *ſtyle* of their writings we ſhall ſee the marks of this *pride* and *ſelf-conceit*; the utmoſt contempt of *other* people's underſtanding, and confidence in their *own*; as if the *reſt* of the world were *wholly* ignorant, and *they* ignorant of *nothing*; at leaſt *capable* of underſtanding any thing that they apply themſelves to. They talk of the awful and tremendous attributes of the Divine Nature, and the methods of God's government with a vaſt deal more *familiarity* than would be thought decent if they were ſpeaking of a *miniſter of ſtate*, and the meaſures of his con-

duct. They are as forward to make objections againſt the wiſdom of the *creation*, and of *Providence*, as if they themſelves could have made, or govern'd the world better. From one man to another of a *ſuperior* underſtanding and ſtation their language would be thought, by all ſenſible people, the higheſt *ill manners* and *impudence*; how then ſhall we uſe words ſignificant enough to expreſs the inſolence, and madneſs, and folly of thoſe who preſume to uſe ſuch freedom towards the *ſupreme Being*, whoſe nature is incomprehenſible, and whoſe ways are paſt finding out? We ſhall diſcover a better underſtanding, and more judgment by *diſtruſt*, than by *confidence*; by *modeſty*, than *preſumption*; becauſe moſt ſuitable to the *nature* and *order* of things. It is a thing fit and proper that an *imperfect* and *limited* underſtanding ſhould look upon itſelf as *fallible*, and that a fallible Being ſhould always be in a ready diſpoſition to hearken with great humility to the *unerring* dictates and conduct of *Omniſcience*. A juſt ſenſe of God and ourſelves, awful ſentiments of *his* excellency and perfection, and a low and mean opinion of the weakneſs and defects of *human nature*, this would be the moſt convincing anſwer to all the cavils of *infidelity*.

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FINIS.